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Zhirinovskii as a Fascist: Palingenetic Ultra-Nationalism and the Emergence of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia in 1992-93[1]

Introduction

In May 1994, the Russian newspaper *Izvestiia* published an article called "A Stance on Villains: From the National-Patriots Comes the Biggest Threat for Russia" written by former acting Russian Prime-Minister and democratic leader Egor Gaidar (1956-2009). The article dealt with Vladimir Zhirinovskii, chairman of the so-called Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) which had won the first post-Soviet Russian multi-party parliamentary elections in December 1993 (22.92%). Gaidar (1994) accused Zhirinovskii of being, among others, a "populist fascist" and a "the most popular fascist leader of Russia." In summer 1994, Zhirinovskii took Gaidar, with reference to these two classifications, to court for libel. The Tver Inter-Municipal Court agreed with Zhirinovskii that Gaidar's labelling of the LDPR-leader is slanderous, imposed a fine of US$250 on both Gaidar and

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Izvestiia, and forced Gaidar to apologize to Zhirinovskii in public (*Segodnia*, 9 September 1994).

The aim of this paper is to challenge the ruling of the Tver Inter-Municipal Court, and to argue that it is possible and useful to classify the central thrust of Zhirinovskii's major political writing at that point – his book *The Last Dash to the South* (Zhirinovskii 1993) – as a fascist doctrine. Indeed, as should emerge below, other labelling such as "patriotic," "imperialist," "conservative," "nationalist" or "expansionist" would, with reference to Zhirinovskii's blueprint outlined in his major book, be either insufficient or misleading. Only "fascism" seems to be a concept which adequately captures, from a comparative point of view, the core impetus of the political agenda exposed in *The Last Dash to the South* (Zhirinovskii 1993).

This argument encounters two challenges not easily overcome. First, there is, as will become clear below, an element of "madness" in Zhirinovskii's blueprint for "going down to the Indian Ocean." A superficial reading of Zhirinovskii's major autobiographical and programmatic pamphlet - a revised edition of which has also been published in English (Zhirinovsky 1996) - may give the impression that this text cannot be taken seriously, and is thus not worth in-depth analysis and comparative interpretation. However, as partly shown below and more extensively documented elsewhere (Umland 1997), Zhirinovskii's plan is in congruence with his more general views on politics, Russia's future, the post-Cold War world and human nature. It constitutes a more or less consistent extension of the implications of his broader beliefs on politics into the realm of post-Soviet Russian foreign policy. As shown below, several of its central arguments parallel, in some respect, recent Western writing on global politics in the 21st century.

Second, the questions of (a) whether there is such a thing as, and (b) how to define, generic fascism as distinct from Italian Fascism, as well as (c) whether it is a useful concept in the context of post-Soviet politics are all controversial. The issue of the existence of a recurring feature in modern right-wing thought resembling core elements of the Italian paradigmatic case will, for reasons of space, not be extensively discussed here. That is because it seems that a consensus in recent relevant scholarship has

emerged that it is (a) heuristically and analytically useful to classify a certain general type of right-wing extremist ideology as "fascist," and (b) thus revealing to compare the different international permutations of fascism - i.e. the specific origins of different fascist movements, their social foundations, strategic-tactical behaviour, organizational structures, leadership-compositions, etc. - with each other (Eatwell 1995; Griffin 1993, 1995, 1998, 2007; Griffin, Loh and Umland 2006; Laqueur 1996; Payne 1980, 1995; Sternhell 1994, 1995; Wippermann 1983, 1997, 2009). While the issue of the existence of some general phenomenon that might be called "fascism" seems to be settled for many scholars today, some problems in defining this term as a generic concept cannot be entirely ignored here, and will be shortly discussed below.

Should the aim of this paper be reached and an intelligible argument in favour of a rejection of the Tver Inter-Municipal Court's decision be found, this would not only answer this particular political-juridical question. Classifying Zhirinovskii's blueprint as fascist would mean to set it in the context of a more general trend in modern right-radical thought. By doing this, the paper should make some contribution to a better understanding of the "Zhirinovskii Phenomenon" in particular, and of contemporary Russian politics, in general. Moreover, putting Zhirinovskii's plan in the framework of a certain generic ideology could be seen as a step towards a larger comparative agenda. It could suggest to find out, in a next step, whether empirical findings and generalizations, macro-theories, hermeneutic interpretations, causal explanations, and methodological approaches which have been developed in dealing with permutations of fascist ideology and its carriers in other contexts, countries and time-periods might be also of use with regard to post-Soviet Russian right-wing politics.

Equally, the interpretation of Zhirinovskii's ideology against the background of fascist theories and concepts might, in turn, be of help in sharpening our understanding of generic fascism. As will be suggested, *The Last Dash to the South* is a relatively novel ultra-nationalist blueprint for which there seem to be few analogies in other countries. In spite of it idiosyncrasy, the agenda contains enough core elements of fascism in order to be classified as "fascist" – a fact that should be also revealing with regard to the concept of generic fascism itself.

The paper proceeds as follows. First, the history of fascist theorizing is shortly reviewed. Following a brief discussion of the usefulness of different concepts of fascism, a particular definition of fascism is introduced in more detail for the purposes of this present paper. Second, Zhirinovskii's biography and the core argument of his blueprint of a "Last Dash to the South" are briefly outlined. The basic thrust of the plan will then be related to necessary and sufficient criteria set out for a fascist labelling earlier. Checking to which degree the core definitional elements of generic fascism apply to Zhirinovskii's ideology will allow to decide whether a fascist labelling is in principle possible here or not. Briefly, I also touch the issue to which degree Zhirinovskii's plan is original, or merely reiterates former Russian and non-Russian right-wing ideologies. Finally, some practical and theoretical consequences of a covering of Zhirinovskii's plan with the concept of generic fascism will be summarized. I shall argue that Zhirinovskii's plan may be of more general use in that it, paralleling somewhat Italian Fascism, can be employed as a proto-type for the conceptualization of a new generic sub-species of fascist ideology that might be labelled "revolutionary imperialism."

Conceptualizing Fascism

Since the emergence of Italian Fascism and German Nazism, there has been considerable disagreement over central aspects of fascist theorizing in Western and non-Western scholarship. Whereas many Marxist, as well as all communist and some socialist theoreticians fully accepted “fascism” as a general term already during the 1920s-1930s (Luks 1985), mainstream West European and North American comparative fascist studies suffered from considerable confusion over decades. This concerned not only the particular intellectual trends, social foundations and political conditions responsible for the emergence of fascist movements in many countries of inter-war Europe. The discrepancies went so far that scholars could not agree on a basic definition of generic fascism, and on where to locate it in the political

spectrum. There was even disagreement over whether there "is" such a thing as generic fascism (as distinct from Italian Fascism). More recently, another debate has emerged evolving around the issue of whether one should or should not use the term "neo-fascism," within the context of the post-War era (Griffin, Loh and Umland 2006).

In 1963, the publication of a much-quoted book by the disputed German philosopher of history Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism* (1963), contributed, among other important publications by Eugene Weber (1964), George Mosse (1999) and Walter Laqueur (Laqueur and Mosse 1966) of that period, to the introduction of a non-Marxist, yet explicitly comparative perspective in the treatment of non-conservative European inter-war ultra-nationalism. This approach has since gained acceptance. An acknowledgement that the concept of generic fascism is useful has permeated much of the following western academic writing, on the topic. However, such questions as how to define generic fascism, and how far the concept is applicable beyond the contexts of Europe and inter-war period remained unclear. Many leading scholars sought refuge by way of avoiding the latter question, and responding to the first with list-definitions that delineated fascism through more or less long enumerations of characteristics of fascist ideology, movements and/or regimes. What was left unresolved, however, was which of these characteristics are of primary importance and thus necessary conditions to label a political phenomenon fascist, and which, on the other side, are of secondary relevance. Often, for instance, certain ideological characteristics of individual fascisms (e.g. anti-Semitism, anti-Americanism, anti-Slavism etc.) can be seen as constituting not core characteristics of fascism, but as functional equivalents that may be present in this or that fascism, or not. They are prominent in one program, and absent in others where they are replaced by traits that may be distinct in substance yet still have, on an abstract level, more or less similar consequences concerning the political actions, style and institution-building of their bearers.

Arguably, the most important development in recent comparative fascist historiography has been the formulation of a comprehensive hermeneutic interpretation, and related lucid definition of generic fascism by Roger Griffin since the 1990s (Griffin 1993, 1995, 1998, 2007; Griffin, Loh and

Umland 2006). Apart from providing a concise capture of the core idea of fascism, Griffin distinguished himself from other taxonomers of fascism in that he applied the classical mode of definition through the *per genus et differentiam* formula. He first established the *genus proximum* of fascism (i.e. the political ideology of ultra-nationalism), and then identified the *differentium specificum* (i.e. palingenetic) that makes fascism dissimilar from other varieties of the more general category of phenomena (i.e. ultra-nationalisms) to which fascism belongs. Thus, according to Griffin's definition, fascism can be conceptualized as "a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism" (Griffin 1993: 26).

"Mythic core" refers in this context less to the extreme utopianism and anti-rationalism of fascism. Rather, Griffin argues that the core of *every* ideology can be understood as a fundamental myth. The simple visionary principles of myths are in general of an irrational kind, and constitute the inspirational power which mobilizes activists and followers of political movements driven by this or that ideology. The term "palingenetic" is, in the humanities, mainly used in the context of religious studies and expresses the myth of rebirth and regeneration. In spite of the obscurity of the term, "palingenetic" ideas are, in fact, common features of human thought. They may emerge in many spheres of social life – whenever attempts are made to renew, regenerate or revolutionize something.[2] In the political context, "palingenetic" is meant to embody the aspiration to create a new order following a period of perceived decline or decadence (Griffin 1993: 240). That means that it neither implies duplication or restoration of, nor a return or relapse to, a former era. Instead, it denotes a cleansing renovation, rejuvenation, or resurrection, on a new level. That means, an ultra-nationalist palingenesis – though, perhaps, containing ideas also associated with ultra-conservatism (hierarchical and ascriptive thinking, sexism, elitism, etc.) - envisages a revolutionary remake of society rather than a counterrevolutionary retrogression to a gone period.

[2] Also, the term is used in biology where it means the repetition of phylogenetic stages of development during germ formation. In geology, "palingenesis" denotes reshaping of rocks through their re-melting (*Kleines Fremdwörterbuch* 1974: 263).

> The fascist mentality is characterized by the sense of living through an imminent turning-point in contemporary history, when the dominance of the allegedly bankrupt or degenerate forces of conservatism, individualistic liberalism and materialist socialism is finally to give way to a new era in which vitalistic nationalism will triumph. (Griffin 1993: 44)

Thus what fascist ideology comes down to is, according to Griffin, "[t]he vision of *the national community rising phoenix-like after a period of encroaching decadence which all but destroyed it*." (1993: 38, emphasis in original)

The notion of ultra-nationalism implies an ideological monism which downplays or even denies other components of human identity, and de facto views human beings not as individuals, but as cells within a national organism – however delineated. This organism does not need democracy, and is seen in a fight for survival, territory and dominance with other, similarly aggressive national organisms.

The definition of fascism as "palingenetic ultra-nationalism" shall be used in the below brief content-analysis of the first edition of Russian right-wing extremist Vladimir Zhirinovskii's most important political book, *The Last Dash to the South* (Zhirinovskii 1993) as well as his articles in some of the 1992-1993 issues of the then official organ of Zhirinovskii's Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) *Liberal* (see also Umland 2008). A classification of central ideas in these publications as fascist would be possible, if (a) it can be proven that their agenda constitutes a permutation of nationalism, (b) their ethnocentrism is sufficiently extreme to be classified as integral, or ultra-nationalism, and (c) this ultra-nationalism is linked to an idea of a national new- or rebirth, and revolution – by whichever means.

Zhirinovskii's Origins

Especially in the 1990s, many accounts of the LDPR tended to portray the steep rise and continuous presence of Zhirinovskii in Russian public life as

constituting a strange cultural and thus essentially non-political phenomenon, or as being merely the result of cunning "political technology" from the Kremlin. Whatever the adequateness of such interpretations at their time, with every additional year that the LDPR is being represented with an own faction in the State Duma and that it takes part in Russia's legislative process, semi-pluralistic discourse as well as foreign relations, it becomes clearer that Zhirinovskii has become part and parcel of post-Soviet Russian history. The perseverance that Zhirinovskii has shown over the years can be linked to some aspects of his biography that make him appear as a more serious personality than is often acknowledged, in publicistic assessments of him. Though being born and having attended school at the periphery of the former Russian empire, the then capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic Almaty, Zhirinovskii managed to enter and successfully finish a study program in Turkology at the USSR's number one college – Moscow State University. Zhirinovskii is said to speak Turkish and English well, and to know also some French and German. He later did a second advanced degree by correspondence at the same university's Law Faculty, has thus two diplomas from Russia's premier higher education institution, and can, from that point of view, be counted as one of the formally best-educated top Russian politicians today.

Zhirinovskii was an official candidate for the President of Russia as early as June 1991. Having started his campaign less than three weeks before Russia's first presidential elections, Zhirinovskii, with more than 7% of the vote, came in third, and was the big surprise of this, perhaps, most democratic poll in Russian history (excluding the inconsequential 1917 elections for the Russian Constituent Assembly that was dissolved, by the Bolsheviks, at its first meeting in January 1918). In December 1993, the LDPR won the proportional part of the first post-Soviet multi-party parliamentary elections, with a large margin – 22.92% of the vote. While Zhirinovskii's performance was less impressive in the 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007 State Duma elections, his party or electoral bloc managed each time to pass the 5% or 7% barrier, and thus has continuously had a faction in the lower house of Russia's parliament. By now, Zhirinovskii has been Deputy State Duma Speaker for several years, and can, in some regards, be seen as Russia's most senior post-Soviet politician. Founded in 1989 and officially

registered in 1991, his party is older than any of the other factions currently represented in the State Duma (the Communist Party of the Russian Federation was formally re-founded and registered only in 1993). By today, it has become obvious that the "Zhirinovskii Phenomenon" is, after all, a political one.

Zhirinovskii's 1991 Russian presidential elections poster (translation: "I will protect Russians and small people on the whole territory of Russia and the USSR." – Candidate for the President of the RSFSR and LDP chairman Vladimir Zhirinovskii.) Source: URL (accessed on May 12, 2010) http://englishrussia.com/images/elections_pr/10.jpg

A Brief Sketch of Zhirinovskii's World View

The starting point of Zhirinovskii's vision of Russia's future is her location in the Northern hemisphere of Earth. Russia belongs, in Zhirinovskii's understanding, to a group of industrialized, modern and civilized nations with a European culture. As other developed Northern countries (USA, Western Europe, Japan), she faces an underdeveloped Southern landmass – Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Near East in the case of Russia, Latin America in the case of the US, Africa in the case of Western Europe, and South Eastern Asia in the case of Japan. For Russia, the way she deals with the "South" will decide her future. Moreover, Russia's "going down to the South" constitutes her world-historical mission in the 21st century.

Zhirinovskii views the "Southerners" (*iuzhane*) as a distinct type of people who are inferior and dangerous in that they are unable to live in peace and rule themselves. At the same time, the "Southerners" are cunning in trying to infiltrate and subvert Russia as well as the whole North. Turkey is the primary target of Zhirinovskii – a Turkologist by profession. Zhirinovskii thinks that pan-Turkism is going to break up Russia from within as well as attack it from outside, and that Turkish culture is, basically, worthless. The Islamic South represents a threat in general. It has, in Zhirinovskii's view, been always the source of war, nationalism, corruption and "decay," and will continue to have destructive influence on the North, in general, and Russia, in particular, if nothing happens. The Northern civilization as a whole is threatened by the Muslim world as exemplified by the Turks' destruction of the Byzantine Empire, their occupation of Constantinople, the Armenian genocide of 1915, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the current flooding of Western Europe with "Southern" immigrants (Zhirinovskii 1993; Umland 1997).

Given these circumstances Russia has to make her "Last Dash to the South." That means that she has to expand her borders once more, and to "go down to the Indian Ocean." Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey are explicitly singled out as future parts of the Russian Empire. By implication, Pakistan would have the same fate. Russia has to go south in order to save herself, the West, and the unruly "Southerners" from self-destruction. The central

term which Zhirinovskii uses in connection with this is *uspokoenie* (soothing). Calming the people in the South will be Russia's mission in the 21st century.

Zhirinovskii during a visit to Baghdad, in the 1990s. Source: URL (accessed on May 12, 2010) http://www.spiritoftruth.org/ images/ zhirinovsky1.jpg

The Ultra-Nationalist Dimension of Zhirinovskii's Blueprint

In spite of aggressive statements such as the above, Zhirinovskii's nationalism has been a puzzle to some scholars, like Robert Service (1998), in as far as the LDPR leader has made – resembling his utterances on other issues – contradictory statements. In the first 1993 edition of his major book *The Last Dash to the South,* Zhirinovskii, for instance, writes: "[A peaceful life] will become possible when Russia finds its national self-consciousness mixed up with pan-national consciousness." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 126) Later on Zhirinovskii occasionally also disapproved of nationalism, and claimed

that he wanted to create a supra-national state. He proposed to delete the line on nationality in the Russian passport. At one point, he observed that nationalism is a "political narcotic" (as quoted in Kulikova 1992: 51). At a press-conference after his electoral success in December 1993, he stated that nationalism is as bad as fascism, and proposed that, until the end of this century, "we" should "put an end to this terrible disease of nationalism" (as quoted in Conradi 1995: 212; *La Stampa*, 16 December 1993; see also Frazer and Lancelle 1994: 151).

In assessing such statements, several aspects of the Zhirinovskii phenomenon are pertinent. First, Zhirinovskii is himself not a "pure" Russian, but has a partly Jewish genealogy. His biological father's name was not Vol'f Andreevich Zhirinovskii as stated in his first official biographies, but Vol'f Isaakovich Eidelshtein, as admitted in his later *curricula vitae*. Therefore, it is for Zhirinovskii problematic to propose narrowly russocentric, or biologically racist ideas (though he has, nevertheless, sometimes done so). Zhirinovskii thus tends to define the Russian nation in cultural terms: "By Russian we mean all those who speak and think Russian." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 118)

Second, to promote a manifestly ethnocentric Russian nationalism would create tension within Zhirinovskii's expansionist program. His plan is to incorporate other nationalities in an all-Russian [*Rossiiskaia*] empire which he describes as a natural union of people from Northern Eurasia down to the Indian Ocean. There is thus a conflict of interests in Zhirinovskii's urge to present his plan to the outer world as beneficial for the West and South (e.g. Umland 1994), on the one side, and to the Russians as securing their predominance on the Eurasian continent, on the other. Zhirinovskii – as all politicians – cannot help making conflicting statements. A less hesitant expression of his undoubtedly existing nationalism would make this incongruence even more obvious.

Third, Zhirinovskii's conflation of the ethno- and supranational is not new in Russian political thought. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the dynastic principle of the Tsarist Empire was often presented as having a universal and not only Russian dimension. This was meant to give non-Russians a feeling of equal consideration with ethnic Russians although, in substance, Tsarist ideology started, with the so-called Uvarov doctrine, to integrate

nationalist ideas, in the first half of the 19th century, and was by the late 19th and early 20th centuries becoming openly russocentric. The messianism of the Orthodox Church too was explicitly pan-national, yet the Russian people, as the primary preservers of the "Third Rome," played a privileged role in maintaining original Christianity. A later attempt hampered with similar contradictions was made by the so called "Eurasianists," a group of émigré intellectuals, in the first half of the 20th century. These intellectuals justified an essentially Russian dominance over the North-Eastern Euro-Asian continent by the supposedly supra-national idea of "Eurasianism" (Laruelle 2008; Wiederkehr 2008).

Under Stalin, Russian dominance and advancement became a priority of the supposedly inter- or even anti-national communist regime (Agursky 1987; Billington 1990; Brandenberger 2002; Behrends 2008). It continued to be a feature of post-Stalin Soviet policies (Messmer 1997; Mitrokhin 2003) as became, for instance, apparent in a number of conspicuous regularities in Soviet cadre-policy, i.e. the staffing of the posts of the Second Secretaries of the Central Committees of the Communist Parties of the Union Republics, officer positions within the KGB and Soviet Army, or offices of the Departments of the CPSU Central Committee (Bialer 1964). Stalin's and the post-Stalinist formulas to conceal a Russian nationalist dominance was "Soviet patriotism" (Oberländer 1967) or "patriotic internationalism" (Kolstø 1984), and the role of the Russian people as an "elder brother" of, or a *primus inter pares* among, the non-Russian Soviet nationalities.

"Natsionalizm" (nationalism), instead, denoted anti-imperial national movements within the Soviet bloc – whether they expressed merely anti-colonial striving for independence or explicitly ultra-nationalist ideologies of Russophobia. Zhirinovskii's crypto-nationalism employs word-games, and ideological window-dressing in ways reminiscent of Soviet newspeak. The autonomy of the non-Russian nationalities has to be preserved, he assures. Yet, Zhirinovskii's Russia would be an explicitly unitary state with a powerful president who appoints all regional leaders including local administrators. The LDP, in one of its official statements, demanded "to put an end once and for all to nationalism," however, in the next column, encouraged Russians "to feel themselves as masters of the whole country,

the former Soviet Union and today Russia [...]." (*Liberal*, no. 8-9, 1992: 2) Russia, Zhirinovskii writes, would be a "common home" (Zhirinovskii 1993: 77) in which many different religious groups could freely develop. Yet, "the bells of the Orthodox Church" would be ringing at the shores of the Indian Ocean (as quoted in Koman 1996: 315). Notably, Zhirinovskii calls both, the army and the currency of his new Russian empire, "*russkie*" (ethnic Russian) and not "*rossiiskie*" (referring to the Russian state) thereby introducing a distinctly ethnic connotation to his view of these institutions (*Liberal*, no. 2[12], 1993: 4). TV broadcasters should not have non-Slavic faces, speak properly the Russian language, and be blond (Spier 1994). Other such examples from Zhirinovskii's writings could be listed (Frazer and Lancelle 1995).

After proclaiming himself for years an anti-nationalist "liberal-democrat," Zhirinovskii changed publicly his line in summer 1993 when, in a major Russian newspaper, he declared:

> Internationalism - that is the common kettle, the dormitory. [...] Internationalism - that is the idea of mixture. Nationalism [in contrast] is the idea of quality. Nationalism - [this means] a separate flat - not a communal one and not a dormitory. [...] The build-up of a national state implies the build-up of a national ideology. (*Izvestiia*, 28 August 1993)

Later, such statements became more frequent.

The integral dimension of Zhirinovskii's nationalism expressed itself in two ways: in his anti-democratism, and the aggressiveness of his ethnocentrism. Endogenously, the image of a homogeneous "we-group" - here of a national organism - is used to justify the abolition of democratic procedures, and to legitimize a hierarchical order. Exogenously, there is, in ultra-nationalism, an overdrawing, stigmatization, and externalization of "the Other" that is used to justify absolute power for a leader who would protect and lead the nation, in its struggle with other "we-groups," and who would not tolerate the luxury of resources-consuming public control.

Zhirinovskii has made numerous unequivocal statements in favour of dictatorship that would ensure a new national unity, and more effective domestic and foreign policy-making (Umland 2007). At other places, he, however, endorsed liberalism, democracy and political pluralism – a

contradiction that resembles his inconsistent use of the term nationalism. An indicator of his political instincts is his project for a new constitution. The 1993 LDPR constitutional project resembled El'tsin's project of the same year: a strong presidential republic divided into Gouvernements, and with a two-chamber parliament. However, not only has El'tsin's Constitution adopted in December 1993 created an initially federal and formally semi-presidential regime whereas Zhirinovskii's project foresaw, from the outset, an explicitly unitary, and purely presidential system. The formal prerogatives of the executive are significantly larger, in Zhirinovskii's project, and those of the legislature to such a degree limited or elusive that there would have been few checks and balances left. For instance, the President would appoint Governors, and through them Mayors and other heads of administration. The President could be elected already in one round, i.e. with a plurality and not a majority of votes, and could be impeached only with a four-fifths-majority (and not a two-thirds-majority, as in the currently valid Constitution) in both chambers of parliament (*Proekt*... 1993).

Unsurprisingly, the internal structure of the LDPR has always been distinctly undemocratic. For instance, at the 1994 LDPR congress, Zhirinovskii was elected (unanimously) party chairman for 10 years, and given the power to appoint by himself all members of central and regional governing organs without consultation of anybody.

The way Zhirinovskii treats "Southerners" can be labelled "civilizational racism." He ascribes to people he subsumes under the term "Southerners" non-human qualities arguing that the Russians would have to bear "the White man's burden" to pacify and control these barbarians (Motyl 1994). In doing so, he does not engage in openly biological argument, but displays a national differentialism also common within the Western extreme right. In his misnamed major newspaper of 1992-1993 *Liberal*, he announced with reference to the "advance to the Indian Ocean:"

> [O]ur model [implies] the dissolution of Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan as artificial states which have no prospects and which are essentially conquesterous [*zakhvatnicheskie*] because these are eternally nomadic tribes. [T]hat is never-ending robbery, attacks [*nabegi*], prisoners- and hostage-taking, [and] violence. (*Liberal*, no. 2 [12], 1993: 4)

In his shortly afterwards published book *The Last Dash*, Zhirinovskii left no doubt that what he has in mind is a full-scale war against "the South."

Let Russia successfully realize her last "dash" to the South. I see Russian soldiers setting for this last Southern journey. I see Russian commanders in headquarters of Russian divisions and armies who draw in movement-routes for combat units and the end points of these routes. I see airplanes on air force bases in Southern regions in Russia. I see submarines surfacing on the shores of the Indian Ocean and landing-crafts approaching the shores on which already soldiers of the Russian army are marching, armoured personnel carriers and huge masses of tanks are moving. Finally Russia is accomplishing its last military campaign [*voenny pokhod*]. (Zhirinovskii 1993: 142-143; emphasis in original)

At another point, he makes clear that he would be ready to pay the price for an occupation of the South: "Regrettably, parts of the population will perish because, in the South, there is not enough medicine and culture." (as quoted in Koman 1996: 319) Zhirinovskii is thus an ultra-nationalist in both, an endogenous and an exogenous sense. He uses nationalism to justify anti-democratism, and is nationalistic to the degree of an implicit propagation of genocide and a military campaign that could lead to World War III.

Zhirinovskii and former Russian President Vladimir Putin. Source: URL (accessed on May 12, 2010) http://premier.gov.ru/media/2008/8/28/9374/ doc_photo.jpeg

The Idea of the Newborn Nation in Zhirinovskii's Ideology

Zhirinovskii's ultra-nationalist plan of an advance to the Indian Ocean could appear, in the Russian context, as being essentially restorative and conservative. Territorial expansion has been a major feature in Russian history. It was, for centuries, the Russian state's mode of existence and an expression of its more generally extensive orientation in national development. While thus containing elements of historical continuity, the overall context of Zhirinovskii's new expansionist drive is radically different today. Not only have the international environment and socio-technological conditions since Russia's earlier expansions changed dramatically giving future imperialist adventures a novel dimension.

Zhirinovskii's justification and explanation of the blueprint, as well as his elaborations on why it is pivotal for Russia to expand, go beyond a mere return to an age-old feature, preservation of a historical pattern, or continuation of Russia's road to modernity. To be sure, there is a backward-looking aspect in fascist ideology, in general, and expressed in a famous formula of the so-called "conservative revolution," a German inter-war proto-fascist intellectual movement. The "conservative revolutionaries" spoke of a "*Wiederanknüpfung nach vorwärts"* - "a reconnection forwards" (Griffin 2000). This means that a "reconnection" with the eternal values expressed in the nation's history would allow society to be regenerated and progress "forwards."

In this sense the "Last Dash" too is a scheme inspired by the past. Says Zhirinovskii: "This is not my whim. This [is] Russia's destiny. This is fate. It is Russia's heroic deed. We cannot otherwise [...] Our development demands this." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 104) Russia, claims the LDPR leader, fulfils a mission every hundred years. Now the time has come again for the Russians who always "[...] carried the freedom on their shoulders in whichever uniform they have been dressed - of the Tsarist army, the Soviet army, [or] the Russian army." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 124) Having saved the world from such villains as Napoleon and Hitler, this time Russia's task is also magnificent: "Russia will do only what is predestined, [it will] fulfil a

great historical mission - to liberate the world from wars which always start in the South." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 76)

Russia thus indeed turns back to its historic role as an ever-expanding state and saviour of the world. However, her rebirth in this role is shaped by novel circumstances, and her expansion has both, a new direction and a different purpose. Zhirinovskii's Russia seeks to occupy countries that never belonged to the Russian Empire, and fulfils a mission not formulated, in that way, by Russian politicians before. Zhirinovskii, moreover, makes clear that this will be the last partition of the world.

The "South" is portrayed as a source of disease which has been and still is purposefully infecting Russia with instability and internal degradation. Zhirinovskii speaks of a "political AIDS" and "political Chernobyl" (Zhirinovskii 1993: 123), and asserts that the peril has always come

> from the side of Afghanistan which is already assaulting Tajikistan; from Teheran which makes pan-Islamic plans for annexation of huge territories; from Ankara where there have been already for long time plans for a Great Turkish State. (Zhirinovskii 1993: 129-130)

These dangers make democracy and pluralism unsuitable for Russia. In an interview with for the German neo-fascist journal *Nation und Europa*, Zhirinovskii theorized:

> In a multi-ethnic state such as Russia, the parliamentary form of Government is an utopia which is, moreover, dangerous for the life of the peoples. The democratic inclination towards decline [*demokraticheskoe upadnichestvo*] opened the channel for an overstrain with aliens. The establishment of a party democracy would be the end of my homeland. Russia can be saved only with an authoritarian regime. (*Liberal*, no. 1[11], 1993: 8)

The "Last Dash" is thus a defensive offensive to prevent Russia's ongoing destruction or subversion by "Southerners," and to save the world from the Islamic peril and "World War III." Russia has "a global task of planetarian significance" (Zhirinovskii 1993: 65-66).

In Zhirinovskii's imagery, Russia is a Northern country caught in the Tundra. Having lost its southern parts, i.e. the Caucasus and Central Asia, it

is in need for recreation space for its people - an argument paralleling somewhat the idea of the Nazis that the Germans need living space (*Lebensraum*): "There at the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean would be holiday centres, youth camps, sanatoriums, houses for recreation for the industrial North." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 66)

The specific value of the warm South has not only a practical, but also a metaphysical dimension: "The warm breath of the ocean will calm all who live in this new geopolitical space, these new frontiers of Russia." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 124) Zhirinovskii finds that Russia has amassed a lot of "filth" in the 20th century. As a result of the "Last Dash," however, the Russians "will enter the 21st century as a different, as a clean [people]." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 117)

Finally, the "Last Dash" is not only valuable in terms of its aims. Its execution as such would be beneficial. It would provide for " the foundation for a renaissance of the Russian army. New armed forces can be reborn only as a result of a battle operation. The army cannot get stronger in registration offices and barracks. It needs an aim, a task." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 70) The "[Last Dash] would be a cleansing for all of us. [...] It will be the mean for the survival of the nation as a whole [...]." (Zhirinovskii 1993: 75, 70)

The Four Palingenetic Dimensions of Zhirinovskii's Ideology

Zhirinovskii's vision of a national palingenesis through a "going down" to the Indian Ocean can be interpreted as having four interconnected dimensions. First, Russia will be reborn by "reconnecting" to her eternal mission of saving the world, and fulfilling a destiny irrevocably given to her by History. This time, she protects the "civilized" North from the growing Islamic threat, and takes on the "white man's burden" of governing unruly "Southerners." Second, the Russians have to execute the "Last Dash" and introduce a centralized, unitary, authoritarian and, at least by implication, Russian-dominated regime from "Kabul to Istanbul" in order to save their

nation from imminent internal degradation that would follow further penetration with aliens. They have to deal finally with the "South" because "all of Russia's ills are in the South" (Zhirinovskii 1993, 45). By way of eventually taking care of its major historic dilemma, the Russian nation will be rejuvenated through its liberation from centuries-old destructive Southern influence. Third, Russia as a Northern country will be reborn by finally getting deserved access to warm waters, and by being able to cleanse herself from the "filth" of the past. She will become a country with a novel, forward-looking identity freed from historical complexes. Fourth, the Russian people and its army will be born anew through the armed campaign itself which will result into a "soothing" of the whole Eurasian continent. Zhirinovskii's Russia would be a *new* country: clean, calm, of so far unknown extension. She would again be equipped with a world-historical mission as well as purified and steeled by a large military operation.

Conclusion: The Ideology of Revolutionary Imperialism

As shown, Zhirinovskii's ideology can be classified as (a) ultra-nationalist, and (b) palingenetic. Zhirinovskii's national revolution is of a peculiar kind. The LDP-leader proposes not merely an internal restructuring of Russia into a centralized unitary authoritarian state, and imperial expansion in order to restore the Russian Empire, or to acquire new resources, labour force, and markets. Such aims, by itself, could, in the Russian context, be seen as constituting merely restorative demands. Their realization would only mean a return to previous patterns.

Instead, Zhirinovskii's russocentric unitarianism in domestic affairs and irredentism in foreign relations is superseded by his obsession with the idea of Russia's degradation and the necessity of the creation of a novel empire. Apart from – for much of Russian nationalism typical – anti-Westernism,[3]

[3] That Zhirinovskii sees Russia as being part of the community of Northern civilized countries, and, at the same, time has made himself a name for being rabidly anti-Western should not surprise. Contradictions such as these have been characteristic of much fascist

Zhirinovskii is especially concerned by the "South" and the "Southerners" and their alleged guiltiness for many, if not most of Russia's grievances and ills. Russia is, in Zhirinovskii's world view, understood as a collective national predator which needs military conquest and dominion of others as this is her way to subsist.

In pre-1945 Germany and Italy, the most important palingenetic metaphors - the Nazis' genocidal racial-eugenic cleansing, and the Fascists' creation of a *stato totalitario* - had, in the first instance, a domestic dimension. To be sure, Nazism had also a universal dimension in that, somewhat similar to Zhirinovskii's world view, it made the Nordic race its primary point of reference. Moreover, the idea of territorial expansion of Germany and Italy was salient in both of these fascist ideologies from their inception. Yet, in Italian and German fascism, the annexation of territories constituted eventually only an extrapolation of their nations' domestic reawakening, into foreign affairs.

In Zhirinovskii's thought, in contrast, the primary palingenetic metaphor has had, from the outset, an international focus: rebirth itself is to be achieved through an advance to the Indian Ocean and creation of a new centralized Russian Empire from "Kabul to Istanbul." That means imperialism is not a secondary stage, outgrow or extension of an internal palingenesis, as was the case Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy. Russia's regeneration itself happens through her new territorial advance. The creation of a novel empire constitutes not a continuation, but the substance of the specifically Russian national revolution. The palingenesis of Russia envisaged by Zhirinovskii is peculiar, but thorough: his ideal state would look unlike any other Russian state before. In the light of its specificity, Zhirinovskii's case can be used to introduce a new variety of palingenetic ultra-nationalism, i.e. to formulate a new sub-species of generic fascism that might be labelled "revolutionary ethno-imperialism."[4]

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political rhetoric in the past and present. It might suffice to mention the inconsistent racial views and policies of the Nazi leadership which adapted its approaches to, for instance, Europe's various Slavic nations according to current necessity. See Connelly 1999.

[4] It needs to be noted that "fascism" is not the only concept with which the "Zhirinovskii Phenomenon" can and should be interpreted, in an enlightening way. "Fascism," to be sure, may be a heuristically more useful designation for Zhirinovskii's agenda of a "last dash to the South" than other generic concepts that can be applied too, e.g. expansionism, racism or

That such a distinct form of palingenetic ultra-nationalism would emerge in Russia should, in principle, not surprise. Russia is a European country, but has, obviously, a – by European standards – unusual history. Above all, it is a nation the identity of which is more deeply informed by its imperial past than the consciousness of those former empires which had their colonies oversees, often on far-away soil.

A major, if not the dominant issue in Russia's national history during the last 500 years has been how far the Russian state should be extended, as well as which territories should be annexed in which ways and for which purposes, to Muscovy's original lands. In distinction, the major issues of 19th century German and Italian history were national unification. In the 20th century, the Germany and Italy were still relatively young nation-states with an insecure national identity that many nationalists felt as being in need of clearer definition and further reaffirmation. The rebirth programs that these fascist movements proposed had thus an initially domestic dimension, and foresaw imperial expansion only in a second step. The core of the Russian "national body" has, in contrast, by now been demographically unified and territorially stable for several centuries.

Many post-war ultra-nationalist ideologies have come to feature prominently foreign policy issues. The world has become "smaller" since 1945 with geographical and political borders losing their significance at an ever higher rate. There is thus no wonder that the most important contemporary European variety of fascism has been conceptualized as Euro-fascism, in that these ultra-"nationalists" are not any longer ethnocentrists in a narrow sense, but are instead obsessed with the "European civilization" or "Occident," and its cultural or racial "identity," "authenticity," "purity," etc. (Griffin 1993, 1995, 1998; Griffin, Loh and Umland 2006).

Finally, the vision of "a clash of civilizations," and especially one between the Christian and Islamic world has not only been evoked by "madmen" such as Zhirinovskii, but also by political analysts such as the late Samuel P. Huntington (1998). Another prominent American international affairs specialist, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has described the central risks of the

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nationalism. However, "fascism" may still not be the most apt concept with which to comprehend the political rise and endurance of Zhirinovskii. A number of other research approaches – populism, anti-politics, protest voting, political technology, etc. – could be me more relevant to an adequate explanation of these phenomena than theories of fascism.

coming century in ways which not only seem to give credibility to Zhirinovskii's paranoid worries, but in some regard even recall some of the Russian fascist's warnings:

The collapse of the Soviet Union has transformed the "heartland" of Eurasia into a geopolitical vacuum. [...] [I]n different ways, for Russia and America, the geopolitical vacuum may become a dangerous whirlpool. The political awakening of Islam is generating not only a collision with residual Russian imperialism in the north but in time is also likely to contest American domination in the south. The former will not be able to disengage because of its settlers and because it will feel bound to contest the intrusion into Central Asia [where Zhirinovskii was born - A.U.] of southern Moslem states; and the latter [...] will not be able to disengage because of its interests in oil and its sense of moral obligation to Israel. The geographical perimeters of the whirlpool violence can be drawn as an oblong on the map of Eurasia. It extends from east to west, from the Adriatic Sea next to the Balkans all the way to the border of the Chinese Sinkiang province; from the south to north it loops around the Persian Gulf, embracing parts of the Middle East, then Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan in the south, all of Central Asia along the Russian-Kazakh frontier to the north, and all the way along the Russian-Ukrainian border. The oblong thus contains portions of south-eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf region, in addition to the southern sections of the former Soviet Union. This area is composed of nearly thirty states, most in the early stages of their own nation-building. Most are yet to be politically defined. Almost none of them are ethnically homogeneous; they are inhabited by approximately 400 million people, and internal violence between their several scores of ethnic groups or tribes - often divided by language, customs, and especially religion - is already fermenting and is bound to erupt with intensifying ferocity [...]. The tragedies of Lebanon of the 1980s, or of Kurdistan and the former Yugoslavia of the early 1990s are previews of things to come within the Eurasian oblong of maximum danger. Within the oblong maximum danger, violence could erupt among a variety of parties in a great variety of combinations. The list of potential conflicts is dismayingly long [...]. At some point weapons of mass destruction are likely to be used, especially given the ethnic and religious passions involved in some of the possible conflicts [...]. (Brzezinski 1993, 155, 163, 164, 195; as quoted in Koman 1996, 320)

When proposing his program of instigating a Russian national rebirth through the creation of a novel empire in northern Eurasia, Zhirinovskii is, in Alexander Motyl's words, "a man of his times" (1994).

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